

Message Text

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S E C R E T USUN 5999

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E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, UN, US, CB

SUBJ: BENNETT MEETING WITH CAMBODIAN CHARGE, NOVEMBER 14

1. WITHIN ONE HOUR AFTER WE REQUESTED A MEETING BY TELEPHONE, CAMBODIANS AGREED TO RECEIVE AMBASSADOR BENNETT. MEETING WAS ARRANGED FOR AFTERNOON NOVEMBER 14, AT CAMBODIAN QUARTERS AT HOTEL ROGER SMITH. BENNETT AND KATZEN WERE RECEIVED BY THIOUNN PRASITH, ACTING CHAIRMAN OF CAMBODIAN DELEGATION, AND AN ASSISTANT WHO TOOK NOTES.

2. BENNETT TOLD THIOUNN PRASITH HE WAS CALLING ON INSTRUCTIONS OF SECRETARY KISSINGER. HE EXPLAINED USG WAS GREATLY CONCERNED OVER FOUR AMERICAN JOURNALISTS MISSING IN CAMBODIA. WE WOULD APPRECIATE RECEIVING ANY INFORMATION AVAILABLE ABOUT THEM -- INCLUDING, IF THAT WERE ALL, CONFIRMATION OF DEATH. THE WAR WAS OVER, AND, NOW THAT THE NEW GOVERNMENT WAS BECOMING STABILIZED, PERHAPS NEW INFORMATION WAS AVAILABLE ON THE FATE OF THESE AND OTHER MISSING PERSONS.

3. THIOUNN PRASITH COMMENTED THAT HE HAD PERSONALLY RECEIVED OTHER INQUIRIES CONCERNING THESE JOURNALISTS. THE CAMBODIAN MISSION IN PARIS HAD RECEIVED A GROUP INQUIRING ABOUT MR STONE. SINCE 1970, HOWEVER, THE CAMBODIANS HAVE ALWAYS REPLIED TO INQUIRIES THAT THEY KNOW NOTHING ABOUT THE WHEREABOUTS OF THE FOUR. THEY HAD NEVER SEEN THEM AND WERE THEREFORE UNABLE TO CONFIRM THEIR DEATH.

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4. BENNETT WENT ON TO NOTE THAT THERE ALSO WERE MISSING JOURNALISTS FROM FRANCE, AUSTRALIA, THE FRG, AND JAPAN. THE NAMES WERE ON FILE AT THE INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE IN ZURICH. BENNETT THEN BROUGHT OUT A LONGER LIST OF AMERICAN CIVILIANS AND MILITARY PERSONNEL ALSO MISSING IN CAMBODIA, AND EXPRESSED SPECIAL CONCERN FOR MESSRS. HARRIS AND VARNADO.

5. THOUNN PRASITH ACCEPTED THE LISTS AND AGREED TO CONVEY THEM AND OUR EXPRESSION OF CONCERN TO HIS GOVERNMENT.

6. BENNETT WENT ON TO MENTION OUR INTEREST IN MAKING A BRIEF NON-PROVOCATIVE, NON-ACCUSATORY STATEMENT CONCERNING THOSE MISSING, IN THE SIXTH COMMITTEE DURING THE DISCUSSION OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN ARMED CONFLICT (ITEM 70). HE STRESSED THAT THE STATEMENT WOULD NOT BE PROPAGANDISTIC. WE HAD NO DESIRE TO CAUSE ANY OFFENSE TO GOC BUT WANTED TO DRAW ATTENTION TO THE SITUATION IN LOW-KEY MANNER SO AS TO GIVE COMFORT TO THE BEREAVED FAMILIES. WE WOULD BE INTERESTED IN CAMBODIAN REACTION TO THIS PLAN. THIOUNN PRASITH ASKED TO SEE TEXT AND LEARN DATE IT WOULD BE DELIVERED. BENNETT REPLIED THAT WE HAD NOT YET RECEIVED TEXT FROM WASHINGTON.

7. COMMENT: BENNETT'S RECEPTION WAS MORE THAN CORRECT. THIOUNN PRASITH SEEMED PLEASED WITH VISIT AND WAS CLEARLY IMPRESSED WITH FACT IT WAS BEING MADE PURSUANT TO THE SECRETARY'S PERSONAL INSTRUCTIONS. HE SHOWED HIMSELF A MAN OF SOME EXPERIENCE IN DEALING WITH FOREIGNERS. HE COMMENTED SEVERAL TIMES THAT HE UNDERSTOOD BENNETT'S STATEMENTS ABOUT THE ANXIETY FELT BY THE FAMILIES OF THOSE MISSING AND SAID HE SYMPATHIZED WITH THE FAMILIES. THIOUNN PRASITH'S OVERALL PROJECTION WAS ONE OF POLITE CONCERN, AND HE OFFERED ONLY ONE ADVERSE COMMENT - A PASSING ALLUSION TO THE GKR'S "MASSACRES" OF JUNE 1971.

8. NOTWITHSTANDING THE EASY ATMOSPHERE OF THIS MEETING, IT WAS NOT CLEAR THAT WE SHALL RECEIVE A RESPONSE OR, IF SO, HOW SOON. NO COMMITMENT WAS MADE TO PROVIDE CAMBODIANS WITH A TEXT OF STATEMENT PROPOSED TO BE MADE, BUT THEY DID RAISE THE MATTER AND THEY MAY WELL AWAIT TEXT BEFORE GIVING REPLY.

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